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DE RUEHAA #1265 2780330
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 050330Z OCT 09
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3573
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3464
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5752
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3328
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3995
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3972
RHMCSSU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS ASHGABAT 001265

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD,

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PREL PGOV SCUL KPAO TX
SUBJECT: BERDIMUHAMEDOV'S "OPEN" PRESS CONFERENCE

¶11. (U) SUMMARY: On October 1, President Berdimuhamedov held his first "open" press conference with state-run and foreign media. The event was heavily controlled and, like most media events in Turkmenistan, designed to develop the President's image. Journalists were forced to repeat questions handed to them by the President's handlers, and only the positive portions of the conference were featured in the state-run media. END SUMMARY.

YOU WON'T ASK OUR QUESTIONS, YOU DON'T COME INTO THE ROOM

¶12. (SBU) The format of the press conference was designed in advance and rigidly monitored. Only credentialed members of the media were allowed to attend, thereby excluding any problematic RFE/RL journalists. In total, the President answered ten questions, five from the local state-run media, two from Turkish press agencies, one from the AP, one from AFP, and one from the Russian outlet "Turkmenistan." The questions (and presumably the answers) were prepared in advance.

¶13. (SBU) Upon entering the room, a state media representative handed each of the foreign stringers a specific question to ask. All of the foreign journalists that inquired whether they would be allowed to ask different or additional questions were ignored during the conference and not provided microphones. When the Reuters reporter refused to ask his "question," he was escorted from the room.

¶14. (SBU) COMMENT: This is Berdimuhamedov's first press conference since UNGA and reportedly the first he has done in such an "open" format since taking over as President. However, it is hard to have a press conference be open when control is so important. END COMMENT.

CURRAN